



Building Healthy Communities



Forging Structures, Systems and Policies that Work in Communities

Stories and Lessons from Building Healthy Communities

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About This Series

A primary tenet of the Building Healthy Communities initiative is that place matters, i.e. where one lives determines how one fares in health, safety and well-being. The 14 communities that are a part of Building Healthy Communities have long histories dealing with policies that have institutionalized class, race and ethnic disparities in education, health and human services, and local government planning decisions. “Health Happens Here” is both a guiding principle and a rallying cry for BHC sites addressing these entrenched disparities.

In this case study series, we explore successes, opportunities, challenges and transitions experienced “in place” as communities endeavor to create and sustain healthy communities for children and families.

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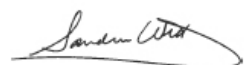
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Background

Building Healthy Communities (BHC) is a 10-year, \$1 billion program of The California Endowment (TCE). Fourteen communities across the state are working to create places where children are healthy, safe and ready to learn. BHC is focused on prevention and strategies aimed at changing community institutions, policies and systems. Through cross-sector collaboration and youth and resident engagement, BHC sites seek to improve neighborhood safety, unhealthy environmental conditions, access to healthy foods, education, housing, employment opportunities and more.

All BHC sites began with a nine month planning process. During that time, sites were responsible for multiple, complex tasks. They were to work with an initial host organization (fiscal agent) selected by the Foundation that would provide guidance during planning. The host organization would remain neutral and select an independent facilitator to support all planning efforts. After forming an initial steering committee and workgroups, they created governance and decisionmaking structures. Local leadership also had to work with TCE Program Managers, who were imbedded in each site to assist with rolling out the complicated process and enable the connection with local systems leaders and policy makers. To determine priorities and strategies, each site created a Logic Model and Implementation Plan focused on 10 initiative-wide, predetermined outcomes. The Logic Model would include targeted strategies to change four systems that impact the well-being of children, youth and families: Health, Human Services, Education, and Community Environments. Finally, each site formed a "Hub" to serve as the central table through which implementation efforts would be coordinated.

Components of the Model that Presented Challenges across all BHC Communities

BHC sites have experienced a number of important successes, even in the early years. However, every initiative comes with timelines, deliverable and structures that can be challenging for communities, and BHC is no different. While these challenges play out differently in each community, several issues have been articulated by all the sites at one time or another. In BHC, a focus on systems change requires work across sectors with multiple stakeholders. In many instances, this is the first time these organizations have worked together in an intensely collaborative way. TCE also made a decision to predetermine 10 outcomes as the basis of all planning efforts, which resulted in community expenditures of time and resources to translate materials, not just from language to language but from Foundation to community-friendly discourse. Additionally, community members and local institutions were often confused about the role of TCE staff in the local process. Many groups had been long term TCE grantees and were used to the Foundation's being more hands-off.



The grantmaking process in BHC is also different from other initiatives. Though individual implementation grants are tied to the Logic Model each site created, the Hub itself has no grantmaking authority, often heightening a sense

of confusion and mistrust. Also, as BHC is an ambitious initiative with formidable goals, the tasks necessary during planning constituted a great deal to do in a limited amount of time. The Foundation has heard these grantee voices and made accommodations for the issues raised. Some

sites, however, experienced challenges that went beyond what TCE had put in place or were unable to overcome the compounded difficulties of a particular set of challenges without outside help.



Transforming Conflict

Building Healthy Communities finds its roots in large scale, complex, community change initiatives, so any narrative acknowledging conflict has to also acknowledge that complexity and include the

many perspectives that reflect it. The multiple perspectives in these case studies are those of institutional leaders, residents, organizers, facilitators and TCE staff. The lessons learned in these communities do not represent a consensus as much as a surfacing. Perhaps this is one of the most important lessons—conflict at this deep level of work does not get resolved but rather can be transformed—from a barrier to progress to a stepping stone toward growth.

Read more about Building Healthy Communities at www.calendow.org.

Place: Boyle Heights (BHBH)

Boyle Heights is an old, historically significant and vibrant East Los Angeles neighborhood with a strong community and cultural identity. As a center for one of the of the largest Chicano/Mexican populations in the United States, many residents speak Spanish as well as English—including the newer Spanish speaking immigrants coming from Central America. Adjacent to downtown Los Angeles, established and elected officials have been supportive of Boyle Heights residents, who have fought hard to retain the character of the community. New leaders are emerging from a pipeline for leadership development among community-based organizations. Many service providers employ progressive approaches that emphasize prevention, comprehensive services and coordinated strategies. Boyle Heights, with its strong sense of place and many identified assets, was poised to make significant change in BHC.



During the planning process, large community convenings under the mantle of “Building Healthy Boyle Heights” (BHBH) involved hundreds of residents and youth in addition to institutional stakeholders. As a result of this work, a vision

and consensus around priority community issues and desired changes emerged. Ambitious and comprehensive, targeted changes included improvements in health status, economic development, affordable housing and school environments, as well as changed norms regarding nutrition and physical activity and the way city, county and state budgets are constituted.

What Happened?

Boyle Heights successfully formed its steering committee and workgroups, created governance and decision making structures, and created its Logic Model and Plan. In spite of these successes, challenges along the way led to a breakdown in communication and trust that ultimately required outside intervention. Broadly, the challenge areas can be identified as: (1) the development of governance and decisionmaking structures; (2) divergent theories of community change; and (3) the power and political dynamics that emerge in the face of change and competition for resources.

Governance and Decisionmaking Structures

During planning, BHBH instituted a process to ensure that youth and adult residents had decisionmaking authority, but organizations called “supportive partners” (serving neighborhood residents but with less than 51 percent of their budget dedicated to the community and/or located outside community boundaries) were not permitted to vote.

All agree this was a thoughtful approach in regard to youth and residents; however, the designation of groups that were the “ins” and “outs,” as they came to be called by many involved, is more complicated. First, in many, but not all cases, the “ins,” groups with decisionmaking authority were community organizing institutions, while the “outs,” or supportive partners were service providers. Second, in many cases, though not all, the organizations within community boundaries were Latino with Latino leadership while the service providers outside the boundaries were institutionalized as white organizations, even though they employed Latinos. Opinions on the extent to which racial tension drove the conflict in Boyle Heights vary since there were some organizations with Latino leadership who were also viewed as outsiders, and it is worth noting that individual perspectives do not reflect allegiance or identity with one racial group or another. In other words, the opinions on these issues, like the connotation of insiders and outsiders, do not break cleanly along easily discernible lines.

Two Change Agents: Community Organizers and Service Providers

From the “in’s” perspective, this governance and decisionmaking structure resulted from a community organizing theory of change that had historically worked well to change systems and policy in Boyle Heights. From the “outs” perspective, the fact that some organizations could not vote set up a dynamic of exclusion that was difficult to overcome. Additionally, the basebuilding strategies utilized by community organizers are quite different from the constituency development most service providers use to engage their clients. When resident involvement decreased, leaving primarily agency staff to populate workgroups, one explanation was that service providers were less inclined to bring their constituents to meetings and expose them to the mounting tension over voting and engagement issues. This explanation also then became part of the tension, as it seemed like the organizing groups were the stumbling block.

Once the plan was submitted, workgroups (with the exception of the Youth Engagement Committee) stopped meeting for more than a year. The split between the two types of organizations was further exacerbated because the host agency was a community organizing institution, which fed the perception of an uneven playing field. BHC specifically identifies the host agency as a neutral convener, but throughout the process, the respective roles of the host agency, hub manager and the Foundation remained unclear to many. Caught in the crossfire and confusion over her role, the Hub Manager, an employee of the host organization, resigned at the end of the first year of implementation (about six months after the workgroups stopped meeting).

At an emergency meeting following the Hub Manager’s resignation, youth and several members of now defunct workgroups (people who to this point had seen themselves without power) stepped forward to assume leadership roles. This demonstration of shared leadership was the first step in the

reconciliation and eventual intervention in which TCE brought in outside facilitators to build trust and redefine governance and decision making structures.

Perceptions in the Community about BHC's Theory of Change

One perception in the community is that not only were there divergent theories of change between community groups but also that the theory of change shifted from the outside, i.e. from the Foundation. This perspective marks the shift as occurring between planning and implementation and being heightened by grantmaking. Those holding this perception believe that the organizing theory of change was acceptable to the Foundation during planning, as organizers did the heavy lifting during this phase of the initiative. However, this assumption was challenged as funds were distributed and the community moved into implementation. While the Foundation had always envisioned and tried to communicate an inclusive process for the Hub as a central table for multisector collaboration, the perception in the community did not always align with that vision. The BHC approach and the emphasis on an expanded table were not always understood by some, who felt instead that priorities had shifted.

Lessons Learned

For organizations and community residents invested in Building Healthy Communities, the experience in Boyle Heights offers important lessons. *Being intentional about managing divergent theories of change early in the process* can alleviate conflict. A variety of strategies aimed at multiple, diverse constituencies can result in the robust engagement campaign necessary to effect policy change. In addition, since we can assume that shifts in large complex initiatives are bound to occur, *open communication and transparency about shifts in thinking and approaches* can support smoother transitions.

Clear and designated roles and responsibilities of all the partners, including the Foundation, planning host agency and hub members from the outset would have been helpful. Foundations walk a tricky line between partners and funders. Transparency about this dual role is necessary. The role of a host agency as neutral convener is also a slippery one, which should be acknowledged and addressed early on.

History of racial tensions and current attitudes, behaviors and policies present a complicated landscape. The ability to navigate this terrain is essential for facilitators and leader. The willingness to work towards *race equity* and to look at entrenched and institutionalized policies is necessary for organizations. Boyle Heights' deliberate work and allocation of resources to empower youth in the planning phase contributed greatly to revitalize commitment by other stakeholders at a critical juncture in the process. A Youth Retreat to seek input on the 10 Outcomes helped to solidify *youth engagement* when other workgroups stopped working together. As a result, five youth now serve on the steering committee.

Finally, opportunities to build capacity of all stakeholders to assume facilitative leadership practices, regardless of their history in the community, can build trust and engagement. In Boyle Heights, people who formerly had no power stepped forward to assume leadership roles in difficult times. Emphasis on a *shared or collective leadership model* can ensure this structural support. Opportunities to practice shared leadership through *trust-building retreats and facilitated conversations* assisted in the development of new structures to support governance and decision making. After the Hub Manager resigned, TCE invested in an outside facilitator to re-establish relationships and find common ground. Facilitators used tools like interest-based negotiation and audience polling devices to find shared interests and understand levels of disagreement. As a result, more inclusive voting rules were established: anyone who lives, works or plays in Boyle Heights and attends two meetings can now vote.

Place: South Los Angeles/Figueroa Corridor (SLABHC)

The South LA/Figueroa Corridor is not a neighborhood per se but rather an amalgam of many neighborhoods designated as the target area by the BHC initiative. The area is home to large cultural and educational institutions such as the University of Southern California and home base for several elected officials including City Council members, a County Supervisor and a current member of Congress. This strong political leadership has supported a long and rich history of community engagement and mobilization with specific successes in policy and systems change. Additionally, South LA's nonprofit sector remains resilient even as the number of nonprofits decreases county-wide. Rapidly changing demographics that have shifted from solid Black working class communities to predominantly Spanish-speaking immigrant communities have come with rising tension, an initial loss of social capital, and competing priorities, but this diversity has also increased the richness of the area, bringing a different slice of working class, low income people. As is true of any change, young people are more open to such shifts. They see similarities more than differences and connect with people different from them more easily than their parents or grandparents.

Through a planning process that was racially, ethnically and linguistically diverse and involved thousands of residents, South LA (SLABHC) identified employment, safety, youth development, lack of access to health care and housing/displacement issues as paramount. The changes they enumerated in their plan include improvement in health coverage, screening and application processes; increased economic opportunities through new, green land use policies and career pipelines; nutrition education and access to healthy, affordable foods; reduction of gentrification and displacement; improvement of existing affordable housing stock together with new affordable housing; more open, safe recreational spaces; elimination of policies that criminalize youth and families; and budgets that contain community-determined alternatives to strengthen youth and families.

What Happened?

SLABHC was able to complete the major deliverables during the planning phase but encountered difficulties that led to a severe slowdown of activity for more than a year. These issues can be broadly identified as: (1) long history of community mobilization; (2) lack of real community identity; (3) tension between old and new leadership; and (4) the Foundation's formidable presence in South LA.

Long History of Community Mobilization

Funded initiatives to make large scale community change have come and gone in South LA with varied results. Many long term community activists have grown weary of the "next new idea," even when intentions are good and resources are provided. This was compounded by a lack of clarity about BHC leadership roles and responsibilities. Already somewhat jaded by a general sense of "initiative fatigue," the community experienced planning process fatigue as well. South LA's long, rich history of sophisticated community mobilization efforts has resulted not only in significant policy and systems changes but also in the development of many small coalitions and/or issue-based alliances engaged in successful campaigns. While many other BHC communities newer to this work use the central table to develop this capacity, South LA's existing successful alliances and campaigns made the perceived value of the BHC central table more elusive.

Lack of Community Identity

South LA BHC is a construct of the BHC initiative rather than an already existing community. As such, it lacks a sense of community identity. In South LA, the different ends of the corridor find themselves with competing interests and perceptions of problems and solutions. Thus something like the USC expansion is a hard felt and pressing issue of gentrification and displacement at the northern part of the place, while at the southern end police brutality, truancy and school push-out policies are more important.

Tension Between Old and New Leadership

The BHC model of improving health and well-being through policy and systems change was not new to the people and organizations of SLABHC, but cross sector collaboration (involving education, public health, land use, faith-based and economic development advocates) was a new approach to many. While South LA is a community with a long history of successful activism in which strong individual leaders can and do claim remarkable success, a track record of collaboration among leaders and across sectors had not emerged.

In South LA, this challenge plays out along racial and intergenerational lines and against changing demographics. Generally, the older, more established leadership is African American, and the younger, emerging leadership is Latino. Multiple perspectives exist regarding how much the Black-Brown dynamic is responsible for the conflict in South LA. However, all who contributed to this case study remarked that the younger generation of leaders (whether African American or Latino) were more likely to collaborate and be more inclusive. SLABHC's host agency during the planning process was an organization with years of success and strong African American leadership. As the planning group was putting structures in place to move into implementation, including the selection of a host agency, other organizational leaders became fearful that the host's agenda would take precedence if they remained in this role during implementation. Hub member organizations also were wary of using up their own assets if they engaged their constituency in Hub efforts that wouldn't necessarily advance their own agenda.

The important host agency decision, therefore, was being made in an atmosphere of distrust resulting from a set of challenges that had not been addressed satisfactorily. At that point, the group made a dual decision: to vote by ballot online and to move immediately to a Request for Proposals process. The online ballot resulted in a two vote difference between the top

candidates with several organizations not voting, and complaints that the RFP and selection process were rigged. Faced with time constraints and grant requirements, a choice was made to let the majority vote stand. For a year following these decisions, tension hung in the air over SLABHC like a thick fog. Individuals and organizations tried to move forward without any clear vision or direction for the Hub as a whole at the same time that the grant approval process allowed only a handful of recommendations to move forward over several months. TCE staffing changes further exacerbated conflict among stakeholders.

TCE Presence in South LA

Throughout its history TCE has made considerable investments and has had long-standing organizational relationships in the South Los Angeles region. With the advent of the BHC place-based initiative, the emphasis on prevention, systems change and equity represented a new way of doing business for TCE, one in which some of the organizations TCE had funded in the past found themselves unsure as to how resources would continue to be available to them. The more limited geographic focus and the potential to collaborate with both existing and new partners led to a complicated dynamic for TCE staff in which organizations positioned themselves to protect relationships and resources, especially as the recession unfolded.

Lessons Learned

As organizations work toward collaborative efficacy, *rooting stakeholders in a common set of values before group decision-making* can thwart unnecessary tension. Expert facilitation is required to help individuals and organizations bridge across competing priorities, cultural and racial differences, and the institutional egos and turf issues that come with successful, powerful stakeholders. Finding points of unconditional agreements and points where individual successes intersect are critical factors for success.

Clear and designated roles and responsibilities of all the partners, including the Foundation, planning host agency and hub host agency from the outset would have been helpful. Foundations walk a tricky line between partners and funders. Transparency about this dual role is necessary. The role of a host agency as neutral convener is also a slippery one, which should be acknowledged and addressed early on. In addition, the Hub structure might not have been the best fit for SLABHC. Considering an *alternative approach to coalition building* during the planning phase—one that reflected this community’s capacity and experience with movement building—might have resulted in a more suitable and/or inviting structure for experienced community activists and leaders.



Intentional strategies to work through issues of inclusion and transparency to address race and structural racism began early on in SLABHC. The planning leadership team was intentionally comprised of a Latino male and

African American woman, and race and ethnic representation was an overt objective in setting up decision-making bodies. Additionally, several discussions on race were conducted with the group, including community residents, providing an opportunity to wrestle thoughtfully with historic and current tensions. The high value placed by SLABHC on *nurturing youth leadership* was also an important factor in addressing inclusion. As young leaders model collaboration, more established, “seasoned” leaders could learn from youth and, sometimes, move out of the way.

Finally, creating time for building trust and navigating relationships can be extremely helpful in recalibrating the collaborative process. In the case of SLABHC, the *trust building retreats convened by TCE and facilitated by outside facilitators*: (1) enhanced the groundwork necessary for meaningful cross-sector collaboration; and (2) enabled development of more inclusive structures for decision-making. A new host organization led by individuals who were credible to the community, with an organizational focus of strengthening community nonprofit infrastructure, and with experience in foundation initiatives, was acceptable to most of the stakeholders.

Final Thoughts

The experiences and lessons of these case studies illuminate both promising practices and challenges communities experience as they work to create and sustain healthy communities for children and families through systemic change. Although each BHC community is unique and the specific experiences and lessons learned are specific to the South Los Angeles and Boyle Heights communities, there are themes dealing with trust, leadership, collective action, and communication that can be applied to community change initiatives in other places.

Future case studies will continue to chronicle the stories of the 14 BHC communities throughout California as they focus on prevention and changing community norms for better health outcomes.